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ABSTRACT

The author describes characteristics of social science publications which suggest that in the future there will be an improved research climate for Chinese scholars and improved opportunities for collaborative work between Chinese and foreign researchers. The publications used as the data base for this presentation are quarterly or bimonthly journals published by China's leading universities. The journals contained articles contributed by faculty and graduate students in the fields of philosophy, social sciences, and the humanities. First, all the articles were primarily philosophical in character and political in content. The journals indicated a high level of agreement with current Party orthodoxy and they appeared to have no desire to deviate from accepted norms. It was significant that trends remained constant throughout the period under review and that there was no sign of retrenchment on the importance of investigative work by Chinese scholars. The second basic characteristic was that even in the investigative reports the data base is very thin. In general, the research reports read like lengthier versions of newspaper coverage. Half of the investigative reports were written by students. This opportunity for students to implement field work and present their analysis in a national forum was a noteworthy development and one of the key indicators of continued opportunity for social scientists in China. The third and final characteristic of these articles which supported the author's guarded optimism was their strong advocacy for future use of quantitative methods, and in particular their eagerness to increase the use of statistical analysis. (Author/RM)

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CHINA'S SOCIAL SCIENCE PUBLICATIONS: Emerging Trends

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CHINA'S SOCIAL SCIENCE PUBLICATIONS: Emerging Trends

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Text of remarks, delivered at the annual meetings of the American Sociology Meetings, Toronto, Canada, August 24, 1981.

I. Introduction

Since the re-establishment of the Chinese Sociological Association and the rehabilitation of most research personnel in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in summer and fall of 1978, the Chinese government has taken significant steps to encourage scholarly debate and research among the small community of professional social scientists -- a heterogeneous group that includes those formally trained as economists, archeologists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists as well as those trained in other disciplines who now write about social problems.

From the perspective of many North American and Western European scholars who look at China in search of their counterparts, the progress of social science in China over the past three years has been minimal. And most recently several American observers have publicly announced that retrenchment has set in and that for the immediate future they see no signs of progress.[1] Such pessimistic conclusions are primarily based on the problems of access experienced by American scholars requesting permission to conduct interview projects. It does not rely on a close or extensive reading of Chinese social science publications, which to date continue to multiply and diversify. My more optimistic conclusions, on the otherhand, are based precisely these Chinese sources and consistently tell a very different story. And, from this specific and narrow, Chinese perspective, I see evidence both for an improved research climate for Chinese scholars as well

as improved opportunities for collaborative work between Chinese and foreign researchers. Before discussing specific trends that justify these more optimisitic conclusions, let me briefly describe the publications that I have used as the data base for this presentation.[2]

II. Overall Characteristics of the Da Xue Bao

Since early 1979, approximately twenty of China's leading universities have published quarterly or bimonthly journals concentrating on recent scholarship in the fields of philosophy, social sciences, and the humanities.[3] In general, articles are contributed by faculty in areas of their individual expertise and each issue includes 15-20, short articles on a wide variety of topics. In addition the journals provide readers with discussions on current political debates and government policy decisions as they affect the special concerns and interests of the university constituency.

In some cases the first issue of the journal was January or February 1979, but in at least three instances, the 1979 issues marked resumption of journals that had flourished in the first years after 1949.[4] These journals can be easily purchased both inside and outside of China. In China they can be obtained as individual volumes or as yearly subscriptions. Prices are low. Each issue costs between thirty-five and forty Chinese cents and is well within the budgets of small research institutes or even of individual scholars.

Sixteen of the journals, representing universities in fifteen of China's twenty-four provinces, are routinely offered to foreign subscribers and most of the others can be obtained by special request.

Most journals give primary attention to theoretical debates that closely resemble the rhetoric and priorities of the national newspaper, People's Daily.

Sociology exists as a separate heading only in the journal of the Jilin Academy of Social Sciences, She Hui Ke Xue Zhan Xian. Anthropology and poltical science are likewise given little special attention. Primarily articles fall into three categories:

(1) Literary criticism

(2) Studies of Chinese History before 1949

and (3) Debates over successful experiments in recent economic policy

Each journal, however, does have its distinctive features and there appears to be significant autonomy in the selection of articles. Thus for example, for the period January 1979 through March 1981, no article appeared in more than one journal. There were no reprints and each article appeared to have been written for one audience. In general the distinctive character of the journals corresponded to special characteristics of the university or the city of its publication. For example, the journal of Beijing University in the national capital had the most articles on law and politics, that of Liao Ning University in one of China's most industrialized provinces has a special emphasis on industrial development. Similarly in keeping with Shanghai's reputation as the most sophisticated of China's cities, the two Shanghai based journals - Fudan Xue Bao and Hua Dong Xue Bao (formerly Shanghai Shi Fan Da Xue Xue Bao) - have more cohesive thematic presentations, more investigative reports, more articles on non-Chinese experiences, and even, a separate subsection of the journal entitled, "Data". In addition FuDan Xue Bao was also the only series I read where the journal had been able to publish additional supplementary issues on special themes. For example, in March 1980, they put out a full issue devoted to articles on economic modernization in foreign countries.

For foreign readers there are several problems in interpreting these articles. For example, authors are never fully identified and the conditions of their research are not adequately outlined so that one can put the report into historical or institutional context. Secondly, footnotes, are rarely used and when provided refer primarily to Chinese editions of the collected works of Marx and Engles.[5]

We also know little about manuscript policy or distribution and readership. Articles on contemporary problems appear to have been published within six months of writing. Those on premodern history or classical poetry could easily have been completed anytime in the last fifty years.

Thus in contrast to western academic journals that have the tendency to publish the newest research and represent the forefront of the discipline, Chinese journals emphasize presentation of an overview and represent a distillation of accumulated wisdom. On the other hand, because of the overtly political nature of all articles, there is a contemporaneity in these journals that in some ways opens them to greater risk of becoming passe than the more research oriented journals of the West.

As I mentioned at the outset, Chinese sociologists have published very little in these journals that is limited specifically to our discipline. Nevertheless, despite limited coverage, reading articles on sociology and those that relate to the general problems or challenges posed to all social scientists give important insights into the evolving nature of social science inquiry in post-Mao China.

Throughout these 1979-80 journals, the published discussion has shared three basic characteristics that support my tempered optimistic about the evolving

role of social science.

First, all the articles were primarily philosophical in character and political in content. The proclaimed objective of sociology, like that of all other social sciences, was to facilitate the official Party goal of rapid implementation of the current drive to realize the "Four Modernizations." There were no signs of dissent from this position and despite clear acknowledgement of shortcomings in current and past policy decisions, none of the authors took the perspective of disinterested observers and there was explicit rejection of the ideal of social science as apolitical, theoretical inquiry.

Taken as a representative reflection of contemporary scholarship in the social sciences, these journals indicate a high level of agreement with current Party orthodoxy and they appear to have no desire to deviate from accepted norms. Thus to me it is significant that trends remain constant throughout the period under review and that there was no sign of retrenchment on the importance of investigative work by Chinese scholars.

The second basic characteristic was that even in the investigative reports the data base is very thin. In general the research reports read like lengthier versions of newspaper coverage and were almost identical in tone and format to essays in the Party's leading theoretical journal Red Flag. However, in contrast to the articles in Red Flag, half of the investigative reports in the journals of social science were written by students, both graduate students and first and second year undergraduates. I found this opportunity for students to implement field work and present their analysis in a national forum, a very noteworthy development and I single it out as one of the key indicators of continued opportunity for social scientists in China. These students initiated their investigations with the support of their universities and of the local

authorities in the rural and urban neighborhoods where they implemented their surveys. The publication of their results also indicates further offical recognition and encouragement. Therefore I see the steady rise in student authored investigative reports as another important support for my basically optimistic conclusions.

The third and final characteristic of these articles that supported my conclusions of guarded optimism was their strong advocacy for future use of quantitative methods, and in particular their eagerness to increase the use of statistical analysis. Throughout the many articles on social scientific method, there was total agreement that statistical methods must become universal in future sociological studies. If these hopes become reality then future social scientists may find themselves with a special talent that will give them leverage to realize their own scholary goals.

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In the absence of a broad data base, detailed investigative reports, or sustained scholarly debate, why have I decided to interpret these dominant characteristic of recent social science publications as positive signs of continued growth for the field of sociology rather than indicators of stagnation or retrenchment? The answer is that the character of these journals represents a radical departure from the quality of scholarly output in the preceding twenty years. Furthermore, within these publications, the assumptions of many of the authors have a coherence that distinguishes them from those who immediately preceded them.

Basically what I see in these journals are scholars defending their right and obligation to do investigative field work without apologizing for their academic expertise. This professional position represents a very distinct and

important break from the 1960's and 1970's when citizens were divided between Reds and Experts. And Expertise was definitely a very dubious resource.

Within these social science publications there are also clear signs that many social scientists have decided that the main ideological problems have been settled and that they are now free to apply their training to a broad range of topics and to quantitative studies of social problems.[6]

To those accustomed to the laissez-faire environment of Western European or North American intellectual debate, this tentatively established, and as yet unchallenged, professional identity of Chinese social scientists may seem an ephemeral or negligible gain over earlier decades. Certainly, I am not claiming that Chinese sociological journals will soon resemble those of this association. Or that we and our Chinese colleagues will formulate our research along parallel lines. But in the Chinese context, the ability of scholars to argue for academic specialization without apology and the willingness of the journals to publish (under the names of individual authors) differences of opinion are not negligible matters. In sum, Chinese social scientists are currently in a period of reconstruction. And as long as the published documentary evidence continues to present a range of opinions, and continues to look at both capitalist and non-Chinese socialist societies as sources of meaningful comparison, the efforts of Chinese social scientists will continue to build a foundation for fieldwork and eventually for sustained intellectual exchange with foreign scholars.

Footnotes

1. Robert Reinhold, "Peking Hampering Scholars for US," NYT, August 16, 1981, p. 1.

2. The two publications of research centers were She Hui Ke Xue Zhan Xian, published by the Jilin Academy of Social Science and She Hui Ke Xue Yen Jiou published by Si Chuan Academy of Social Science Research. The 12 university journals were: Bei Jing Da Xue Xue Bao, Fu Dan Xue Bao, Gan Su Shi Da Xue Bao, Hang Zhou Da Xue Xue Bao, Hua Dong Shi Fan Da Xue Bao (formerly Shanghai Shi Fan Da Xue Xue Bao), Jilin Shi Da Xue Bao, Lan Zhou Da Xue Xue Bao, Liao Ning Da Xue XuenBao, Nanjing Da Xue Xue Bao, Nankai Xue Bao, Xia Men Da Xue Xue Bao Zhong Shan Xue Bao.

3. Journals in the Natural Sciences are published separately.

4. For example, #1 issue in 1979 from Beijing University was issue number 71. In the total series from Hua Dong Shi Fan Da Xue in Shanghai #1 in 1979 was number 23 and from Liao Ning University it was number 35.

5. In some issues, however, there are precise footnotes to recent issues of newspapers or magazines that are traceable in librar outside China. Citation and title are not given but even when page number has been omitted, we would probably track down the article through the subject matter.

6. For example of those who argue for a broad definition and open debates see, Wang Gui-Min. "There are no Forbidden Areas in the Realm of Science," Huadong Shi Fan. Da Xue #3 1979, pp 8-12.